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Asteroids Carry Mount Holyoke Names

Two asteroids now bear the proud names of members of the Mount Holyoke community.

As of July 31, two of the many minor planets orbiting between Mars and Jupiter carry the names 7272 Darbydyar and 6949 Zissell, after Darby Dyar, associate professor of astronomy, and Ronald Zissel, longtime astronomy lab director, who retired last year. Both asteroids are probably about 5 to 10 kilometers in diameter.

Instrumental in the naming was Thomas Burbine, visiting assistant professor of astronomy, who submitted Dyar and Zissell's names to the Minor Planet Center at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics.

"It is a big deal because you now have a minor planet named after you," Burbine noted.

"There are only about 14,000 named asteroids. These asteroids will be around for billions of years."

Of approximately 380,000 known asteroids, about 160,000 have their orbits characterized well enough to have numbers, and about 14,000 have names, Burbine said. Both comets and asteroids can be named, but while comets can be named only after their discoverers, asteroid names are drawn from a wider array of names, including mythological figures, cities, and those of persons who, like Dyar and Zissell, have made significant contributions to the field of astronomy.

In petitions to have the asteroids named, Burbine submitted the following citations about his colleagues:

"M. Darby Dyar (b. 1958) is a professor at Mount Holyoke College who specializes in Mössbauer spectroscopy of terrestrial and extraterrestrial material. Data from Darby's

laboratory has been vital for understanding Mössbauer measurements done by the Mars Exploration Rovers."

"Ronald (Ron) Zissell (b. 1943) is an astronomer who has dedicated much of his career to variable star observations. Through his tireless work as a laboratory instructor, Ron has also enriched the life of students at Mount Holyoke College."

According to Burbine, the asteroids can be seen with a telescope if you know where to look. To get the coordinates, enter 6949 and 7272 in the appropriate box on the [Minor Planet Center's Web site \(http://minorplanetcenter.net/\)](http://minorplanetcenter.net/).

Related Links:

[Mount Holyoke Mission to Mars \(http://www.mtholyoke.edu/news/story/5271286\)](http://www.mtholyoke.edu/news/story/5271286)

[JPL Darbydyar Database \(http://ssd.jpl.nasa.gov/sbdb.cgi?sstr=7272\)](http://ssd.jpl.nasa.gov/sbdb.cgi?sstr=7272)

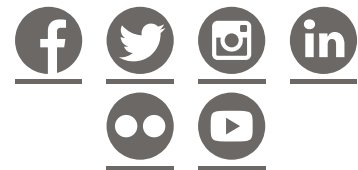
[JPL Zissell Database \(http://ssd.jpl.nasa.gov/sbdb.cgi?sstr=6949\)](http://ssd.jpl.nasa.gov/sbdb.cgi?sstr=6949)

[MHC's Ronald E. Zissell, Astronomer Extraordinaire \(http://www.mtholyoke.edu/offices/comm/csj/050500/Zissell.html\)](http://www.mtholyoke.edu/offices/comm/csj/050500/Zissell.html)

[Darby Dyar - Faculty Profile \(https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/facultyprofiles/darby_dyar\)](https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/facultyprofiles/darby_dyar)

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